

# Three Years, Six Semesters, and Thirty Assessments Later: The Reflections of an Undergraduate Student

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## REFLECTIONS OF AN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT

When it is put into words it doesn't seem that much, but when you are sat in those lectures, week in and week out, putting in every hour you can to hit those deadlines, words begin to fail you.

Adulthood is typically a time when we come to reassess some of the expectations we held during our more influential years, when we begin to look back and reflect on those past experiences which have developed us into becoming the person we are today; capturing the revolutions of this life of continual change. Structured reflection is a formalised process of looking back on past achievements and failures (whether that be in one's career, personal circumstances, or academic life), and critically reflect on the 'why'; the reasons behind what we do, and the 'why' of the things we do. Personally, my childhood and teenage years gave me plenty to reflect on, and led to the stark realisation that the expectations I had once held for my life had not, in fact, been met. Realising this point prompted me to assess where I now wanted to be, and more importantly how I was going to get there; thus forming the beginning of my academic journey in Sport Science.

After ten years away from education the experience of being sat in my first lecture was an entirely overwhelming one, and now as a Doctoral Research student and a member of staff at the same university I studied at, I realise how influential that first lecture was. Critical thinking, understanding, planning, and active listening; it was the benchmark that I have based all my assessments and research on. Everyone can identify goals which they want to accomplish, and likewise ambitions they want to fulfil in life. However, most people realise that achieving these goals and aspirations requires a dedication and commitment to hard work, and in higher education you definitely only get out what you have put in.

I have personally always viewed a challenging problem as a task that needs to be mastered. I have failed on numerous occasions, but my determination to succeed has kept me driven forwards regardless of such set-backs. From my first assignment to my PhD proposal I have striven to succeed, and on those few times when I fell short I would ask myself why. It is completely acceptable to not be the best at everything, but for me it was about understanding how to better myself, how to push myself and how to reach my full potential.

I did not start university knowing what I ‘wanted to be when I grew up’; I did not have an agenda. Looking back I can honestly state that I simply possessed a purpose, and a point to prove to myself that my life was worth more than what I had come to settle with. It has been said that your university years are the best years of your life, and now having lived them I would wholeheartedly agree, but perhaps not for the reasons that most people would find themselves striking such an accord. My time as a student has taught me a lot about myself, but more importantly it has revealed to me what I am capable of. University took a naïve, somewhat ignorant, and an occasionally lost person and created a well-educated, focussed, and ambitious one from the same clay. A degree is not just about what classification you get at the end, it is about those aspects which are far more difficult to measure, but which are equally far more important and moulding of success and fulfilment at the end; higher education develops a meaningful determination to succeed, whether it is your first presentation or your last assignment, and the ability to determine how you might get there by yourself. All of the blood, sweat, and tears that go into every word of each and every essay, the clicking submit knowing you have given it your all, a degree is part of a much longer journey, and the certificate at the end is merely the closing of a chapter not the ending of a book.

The next chapter of my academic journey is already underway as I have commenced working on my PhD studies. Today I sit at my desk as a Laboratory Demonstrator within the Sport Science department at the very University where I my voyage into academia began. I like to think that I have brought the same determination and enthusiasm to my own research as I did to my undergraduate degree, only now I recognise that the ability to succeed lies very firmly on my own shoulders and cannot be shaped by others. Whilst I have accomplished certain goals and aspirations already, the tale of my academic expedition is far from over.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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